

Texas A&M faculty decry plans to reopen campuses in midst of pandemic

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Faculty, professors and students at multiple Texas A&M University affiliated campuses, angered by the University System's refusal to transition to fully online classes, penned an open letter addressed to the A&M Chancellor John Sharp and the Board of Regents which has garnered around 900 signatures as of Friday.

The letter cites wide support for social distancing measures in the university system, noting that the Faculty Senates of Texas A&M University (TAMU) San Antonio had passed a resolution to move fully online, while TAMU Corpus Christi passed a resolution that allowed faculty to choose their mode of instruction. It also stated that members of TAMU Corpus Christi, Texas A&M International University, and TAMU-Kingsville "support moving fully online in order to reduce the spread of this lethal pandemic across campuses and the regions we serve, and the communities in which we live."

The letter proceeds to call on the A&M University System to "grant our universities the leeway to make independent decisions about the course delivery methods that will best serve and protect our students and communities during the COVID-19 crisis."

To put it bluntly, the reopening plans of the A&M University administrations are aggressive and brutal.

Texas A&M (College Station) Provost Carol A. Fierke has stated that more than 50 percent of the fall classes (which start Thursday) sections will be offered in-person, with more than half of students having two or more courses in person. Similarly, A&M-Kingsville is planning to hold a mere third of its courses online while the rest are to be taught in a hybrid of online and face-to-face instruction.

Texas A&M University President Michael K. Young has even floated the idea that the university might set a threshold for shutting down in-person classes to as high

as 100 infections per day, which would be nothing short of a complete disaster.

Cynthia Teniente-Matson, president of TAMU San Antonio—which is scheduled to open Thursday—said that 10 percent of courses would be taught in person and 20 percent in a "hybrid" format where the faculty and some students would be in the classroom, although she claimed that all face-to-face teaching would be done by faculty who volunteered.

Contrary to the assertion that face-to-face teaching would be voluntary, five professors speaking to San Antonio Express-News explained that these courses would be taught by adjunct instructors that are only paid for each course taught and would otherwise not be hired. This is economic blackmail; the adjuncts are basically told "work and get [COVID-19], or starve."

Most Texas A&M Universities are situated in virus hotspots, such as TAMU Corpus Christi, which accounts for more than a third of the signatures. Corpus Christi, in Nueces County, had 351 new cases last Saturday and has seen 270 total deaths from COVID-19, with 4,659 cases per 100,000, more than twice the state average.

In a weekly coronavirus report released Friday by TAMU Corpus Christi, it was estimated that a potential one in every ten residents of Coastal Bend, where Corpus Christi is located, could be infected with the virus.

The report also provides data on the travel habits of residents of Coastal Bend based on cellphone tracking, which estimated that residents traveled to around 97,000 locations outside the Coastal Bend region in Texas, and that 64,000 visits were made by Texans from outside the region, underscoring the need for a coordinated effort to contain and eradicate the disease.

The report summary states that the "Texas-Wide-

Outbreak is Not Over,” adding, “cell phone data predicts increasing transmission rate, cases in future... [we need] to continue efforts to reduce transmission, not time to relax.”

The Texas A&M University System’s news release states that “The Texas A&M University System Regents on Friday voted to reopen the System’s 11 university campuses for the fall semester, employing a mixture of face-to-face instruction with remote and online learning.” The release makes it clear that the board of regents is on board with the reopening, only giving lip-service to social distancing policies and to the basic health and safety concerns of faculty, staff, and students.

The news release also endorses the reopening of sports, which has already been proven multiple times to lead to infections of athletes, as demonstrated in the case of the University of Houston and Texas Tech, as well as many other universities around the country.



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